

ISSUE 8

TAKE ONE!

STEREO FLAVORS

FOOD & CULTURE MAGAZINE



KOREAN MEXICAN TACOS
INDONESIAN PANCAKES
CAN FRIED FISH REPLACE FRIES?
LEARN TO MAKE CUCUMBER KIMCHI

YEMENI FOOD IN WEST PHILLY
IS EGO COOKING ANYTHING?
PERVERSE PLANNING
PROVOKES PHO POUTINE

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

For some reason, people forgot what it was like to play with their food. I'm not sure what happened. Perhaps a bit of pretension, or maybe people forgot how to be kids. I think about food a lot. I think about the restaurants that prepare it, and I'm infinitely curious about why they made it that way.

I rarely see people doing anything fun outside of the quick-hit videos on the internet. "Today we're making rigatoni but with a Mexican twist." Ok, yeah, that's fun, but also that sh*t is made to be here today and gone tomorrow. I want to see it on a menu somewhere, not just online.

One chef that I love was and still is Kenny Shoptsin. If you haven't seen the movie 'I Like Killing Flies,' I suggest you do. Kenny wasn't afraid to play with his food.

Serving up dishes with a side of half-baked wisdom, it's something not to be missed. Without giving too much away, I'll say this. Chopping up pancakes, putting them in batter, and calling them Post-Modern Pancakes is insane, in a good way. I live for that stuff. In this issue, you'll find some of that. I think it's important to play with your food and not to "lose your dinosaur" in all this.

I know it's something I'm always striving for when it comes to the magazine. As always, I appreciate you for picking this up. It means the world to me.

Steve Martinho
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IN THIS ISSUE

It's Time To Eat Indonesian Pancakes At Martabak Ok

by Steve Martinho..... 3

Phoutine..... 9

A Taste of Yemen in West Philadelphia

by Steve Martinho..... 11

Hang On To Your Ego, Then Let It Go

..... 19

Korea Taqueria..... 21

Cucumber Kimchi

by Alex Sherack..... 27

Fry Curious, Finding Comfort In The Unknown

..... 29

IT'S TIME TO EAT INDONESIAN PANCAKES AT MARTABAK OK

BY STEVE MARTINHO | PHOTOS BY K.C. TINARI



I had passed Martabak Ok more times than I could count. The yellow, red, and black signage makes it hard not to notice. The big bold colors and hard edges looks more of a warning label than a restaurant front. It's the kind of place you clock in passing, file away for later, and keep walking until curiosity eventually prevails.

I walked in without much of a plan and walked out carrying a box that felt heavier than it looked. I couldn't eat this alone, so I headed to a friend's shop to see if they would be interested in trying something new. We ate it the way you're supposed to eat things you don't fully understand yet. Together. No plates, just tearing, pointing, trying to land on a comparison that didn't flatten it. We ordered what the person at the counter called the original: cheese, chocolate sprinkles, peanuts, sesame seeds, and sweetened condensed milk. Rich, glossy, unapologetic. Someone said peanut butter and jelly, and nobody disagreed. It was the closest thing we could come up with.

Martabak, for those unfamiliar, is an Indonesian street food staple. In its sweet form, it's a thick pancake cooked in heavy pans until the surface sets and the interior opens into a honeycomb of air pockets. Crisp at the edges, light and elastic inside. Buttered generously and finished with toppings that lean toward abundance rather than restraint. It's cut into squares, meant to be passed around, eating while standing, and argued over politely.

Martabak is street food. Food built for heat, speed, and hands. In Indonesia, it's cooked in massive cast iron pans over roaring burners, the kind that demand commitment.

The pans matter. Each one weighs close to fifteen pounds, thick cast iron built to sit over roaring burners and stay hot for hours. They're not designed to travel, and they don't forgive underpowered heat. That's part of why martabak hasn't quietly slipped into a stall at the Southeast Asian Market in FDR Park. You don't just show up with batter and toppings. You show up with infrastructure, multiple burners, and serious fuel. Enough output to keep up once people start lining up.



1801 Washington Ave, Philadelphia



When I asked why you don't see martabak at the market, the answer was simple. Logistically, it's too much. So instead, Martabak Ok opened their own space in 2018.

Sweet martabak is usually the gateway. It's what makes sense first. But it isn't the whole picture. Savory versions exist too, folded and sealed with eggs, meat, and scallions, landing somewhere between snack and meal. Taking their recommendation, we stuck to the sweet side on our visit. Along with the original, we tried green tea and red velvet. The red velvet won. Red-hued batter, crushed Oreos, condensed milk, and cream cheese. Loud, indulgent, slightly ridiculous in the best way.

Philadelphia has Indonesian restaurants but not much of this particular layer. The street-level stuff, meant to be eaten without settling in and built for hands instead of plates. The kind of cooking that carries its own rules, its own equipment, and its own rhythm. Martabak Ok doesn't translate Indonesian cuisine for the city. It brings over a habit that usually lives outdoors late at night, and surrounded by people.

One box and a few friends, passing pieces with sticky fingers. Just the quiet culmination that some foods don't ask to be understood first. They ask to be shared. 

MARTABAK BATTER

A thick, yeasted pancake batter cooked until honeycombed, crisp at edges, and soft, chewy, and elastic inside.

CHOCOLATE SPRINKLES

Crunchy chocolate sprinkles soften with heat, delivering nostalgic cocoa bitterness and texture without overpowering the pancake.

PEANUTS

Crushed peanuts bring roasted depth and fat, grounding the sweetness with nutty heft and familiar comfort.

SWEETENED CONDENSED MILK

condensed milk ribbons everything together, glossy and dairy-rich, amplifying sweetness while smoothing edges overall balance.

CHEESE

Shredded mild cheese melts into the pancake, adding salt, stretch, and a savory counterpoint to sweetness.



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PHOUTINE

BY STEVE MARTINHO

Phoutine came together in a drunken stupor, alone in the kitchen, when impulsive thoughts felt unavoidable. Leftover pho could've stood on its own, but self-restraint tends to disappear at that hour. Fries suddenly feel like a logical next step, poutine logic taking over without authorization. Turning pho into gravy felt sacrilegious, but the spices didn't collapse; they mutated into star anise and fish sauce, settling into a comforting gravy built for fries and cheese rather than noodles. It wasn't planned; it was just a late-night experiment that worked. Try it for yourself. Alcohol not required.

INGREDIENTS

BASE

French fries
Mozzarella cheese curds

PHO GRAVY

Pho broth
Butter
All-purpose flour

PROTEIN

Cooked pho brisket
Cooked flank steak
Any pho protein works here.

TOPPINGS

Cilantro, chopped
Thai basil, torn
Scallions, sliced
Raw onion, thinly sliced
Jalapeños or fresh chilies, sliced
Lime wedge

METHOD

In a saucepan over medium heat, melt butter. Whisk in the flour to form a roux, and cook for 1 to 2 minutes, until lightly golden. Whisk in pho broth slowly until smooth. Simmer until thickened to a gravy consistency. Season if needed.

Spread hot French fries on a serving plate or bowl. Immediately scatter mozzarella cheese curds evenly over the fries.

Ladle the hot pho gravy over the fries and curds. The heat should melt the curds without completely breaking them down.

Top with sliced brisket and flank steak, or your chosen pho proteins.

Finish with cilantro, Thai basil, scallions, raw onion, and jalapeños or chilies. Serve with lime wedge on the side.



PHOTO BY K.C. TINARI

A TASTE OF YEMEN IN WEST PHILADELPHIA

SAMBOOSA • HOUSE SALAD • MARAG • SALTAH • LAMB FAHSA • LAMB HANEETH • LAMB GHALLABA • AQDA LAMB • LAMB KEBABS
GRILLED LAMB CHOPS • LAMB LIVER • CHICKEN MANDI • CHICKEN GHALLABA • MULUKHIA WITH CHICKEN • FAHSA TUNA

BY STEVE MARTINHO | PHOTOS BY K.C. TINARI



I'm sitting at a small brown table with KC Tinari, David Wesolowski, and Jason Okdeh. We clink bottles of a foreign soft drink called Guaraná Brazilia, made from the guaraná fruit of the Amazon. We're at a Yemeni restaurant. Why is there soda from Brazil? If there's one thing I know, it's that food doesn't move in straight lines. Migration always leaves a fingerprint.

Yemen has one of the oldest trading histories in the world. Coffee is the famous example, but the deeper truth is that Yemeni culture has always been outward-facing. Yemeni families in Philly live alongside Brazilian, Dominican, West African, and Caribbean communities. Distribution networks follow people, not passports.

Hadramout is in West Philadelphia, just a few miles from my home. I've been here before. I knew what this place could do to a table. I wanted my friends to feel it too. There's nothing flashy about it, which feels intentional. Like the food has already done enough traveling and doesn't need to explain itself anymore.

A young woman laughs as we proceed to order practically everything on the menu. "Do you need a larger table?" she asks. Surely what we were ordering couldn't take up that much space. We thought the dishes might come out one by one. Instead, they arrive in stacks of three and four. Fast. Relentless.



As she comes back out, she slides the half table next to ours and starts filling the space between us. Char-grilled poultry, deeply spiced meats, steaming platters, warm bread stacked and ready to be torn apart. The table disappears under it all, and we start laughing because there's nothing else to do.

At one point, the owner comes over and looks at what we've ordered. He tells us that since every dish already comes with rice, we probably don't need any more. We laugh. He says we can take the extra rice to go at the end. The food keeps coming anyway.

(Continued on page 15.)





The locals at a nearby table fix their gaze as we prepare to indulge in what looks like it could be our last meal.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't projecting my own insecurities onto what they were thinking. "Stupid fat Americans," I thought. But then I remembered something I read about Yemeni culture before coming. Traditional Yemeni meals are typically eaten in the middle of the day, and from what I've read, it's often the main meal. You're supposed to take your time. So we did. I didn't feel that bad.

A sizzling clay pot hits the table, and the aroma of shredded beef and spices wafts through the air. Fahsa, a staple of Yemeni culture, is a slow-cooked lamb or beef stew made with



cumin, coriander, and cardamom, served piping hot in a stone pot with a fenugreek-based sauce called hilbeh. Everything here is meant to be eaten with your hands, despite the silverware on the table for us uncultured swine. We rip into the fresh bread and pinch the scalding stew between our fingertips, the bread acting like a kind of oven mitt.

We look at each other in culinary bliss as we dive into the other dishes, pacing ourselves, making sure we leave no stone unturned. The whole grilled chicken, still steaming as we rip into it, was made with nothing but love. Marinated with cumin, coriander, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, turmeric, and ginger, then finished over hot coals.

We were only two dishes in and already enamored with the home runs coming out of the kitchen.

I joked that I wouldn't be mad if this was what we ate for Thanksgiving. I love a good turkey, but looking back, what I was feeling wasn't just about the food. It was the company. The table itself wasn't unfamiliar. It felt like something we already knew.

If there's one thing you should know, it's that Jason loves lamb. We all do, but his Syrian ancestors were screaming at him to order at least three lamb dishes. We got the grilled lamb chops, kebabs, and lamb haneeth, a slow-roasted lamb shoulder that fell off the bone as we lifted it over the rice.



Tender, fatty, savory meat glistened our lips. This was a feast fit for a king.

I could describe every dish in excruciating detail, but I don't want to set anyone up for unfair expectations. In fact, I think that's what makes Hadramout so special. It isn't about chasing some perfect bite. It's about sitting down and letting the table do what it's meant to do.

By the end of the meal, Hadramout stopped feeling like a restaurant and started feeling like a place you bring people to. I'd been here before, but this was different. Watching the food pile up. Watching everyone loosen up. Watching the room take us in without asking for anything in return. No cocktail list. No curated vibe. No one trying to sell us an experience. It felt less like a statement and more like the natural result of a food culture that's been passed hand to hand, place to place, without needing to dress itself up along the way.

In another neighborhood, this same meal would come with a full bar, an automatic 18% gratuity, and a story about why it matters. Here, it just did. The food was honest. The room was humble. We ate, we laughed, and we took our time. Sometimes that's enough. 



Hang On to Your Ego, Then Let It Go

I recently had a conversation with someone about a collaboration dinner with a few head chefs, who I shall not name. During this dinner, the chefs ran into a problem. Everyone wanted to hog the ball. Imagine three head chefs running a full kitchen, scrambling, not letting each other do their jobs—utter chaos. Everyone wants credit, but at what expense? You know the saying, “too many cooks spoil the broth.” That was the epitome of what was happening.

Isn't that the opposite of collaboration?

When we collaborate with people, we should do it because we like letting go of who we are. We spend so much time trying to keep control in the kitchen that we forget what kind of beauty can happen when someone else takes the reins. Sometimes it's good to get outside your own head and leave space for others to create WITH you, not for you.

Sydney Welch wrote a great book, *The Art of Collaboration*, which I highly recommend. In part two, there's a chapter called *Defining Roles* with Leaf Shave where she writes,

“Collaboration involves the bringing together of multiple minds, and in a business setting, this can sometimes lead to uneasy power dynamics. To successfully collaborate and avoid the issue, defining the roles of each collaborator is important.”

That was something that hit close to home to me because in a kitchen, roles matter. So naturally, you'd think that when you put more than a few chefs in a room, that would be the first thing they nail down. Instead, it took a manager from one of the restaurants to slam on the brakes and put everyone in their place. Picture this: a room filled with award-winning chefs standing frozen, getting absolutely torn apart by the manager. Wild!

It reminded me of the Beach Boys' *Hang On to Your Ego*. The song opens with a line that could just as easily describe chefs at that table:

“I know so many people who think they can do it alone. They isolate their heads and stay in their safety zones.”

That's ego in a nutshell. It pushes you to prove yourself, but it also builds walls.

Ego can be the hidden seasoning in collaboration. A little makes the dish better. It pushes people to bring their best. But too much and it overwhelms the plate. The song nails that tension:

“Hang on to your ego, hang on, but I know that you're gonna lose the fight.”

In other words, you can grip it for a while, but sooner or later, it gets the better of you.

What struck me wasn't that the chefs needed someone to step in. It was about who stepped in. Not another chef, but a manager. Someone whose role isn't to cook but to keep order and turn noise into structure. Maybe that's the quiet truth about collaboration. It's not always the loudest or most talented voice that leads, but the one that can hear all the others.

Collaboration isn't about who's got the sharpest knife or the flashiest plate. It's about trust, roles, and timing. Controlling your ego just long enough to bring your best to the table, then let it go before it drags the whole song off-key. 

KOREA TAQUERIA

NOTHING LOST IN TRANSLATION



The word fusion feels like a cheap trick. A marketing shortcut. A way of saying something is different without illustrating why it works. Two things pushed together for the sake of novelty.

That is not what is happening at Korea Taqueria.

What Alex Sherack and Rene Lopez are doing feels closer to fluency. Korean and Mexican food already understand each other. Both cultures speak in acid and heat, slow-cooked meats and fermented depth. Food built for long shifts, late nights, and being eaten with your comrades. This isn't a mashup. It's a shared language expressed through their deep passion and dedication to their craft.



We went to Korea Taqueria around noon on a weekday, catching them in that soft stretch before the lunch rush—heads down, everyone quietly working at their respective stations.

A batch of chicken is dropped in the fryer while sizzling bulgogi beef hits the flat top. You can smell the spices coming from an oversized pot of birria simmering on the stove, a rich, red broth made with dried chiles, spices, garlic, and tomatoes. A recipe of Rene that was passed down and is now living inside the restaurant.



While Rene ladles portions of the flavorful beef consome into ramekins, Alex tells us about his kimchi as he lifts a giant piece of the ruddy fermented cabbage from a tub. That was the moment when you could sense the connection between both worlds, with each of them bringing something deeply rooted in their culture to the table.

One of Korea Taqueria's specialties is what they call 'KFC', their Korean fried chicken. Crispy, double-fried wings, seasoned with salt and pepper, garnished with scallions and toasted sesame seeds.



On the side, some house-made gochujang chipotle mayo. Alex expressed that they've been perfecting the recipe and feel they've finally dialed it in. They even went as far as having special boxes made with breathing holes to ensure the wings don't get soggy during delivery. That's the kind of care and love you can expect out of Korea Taqueria

No self-dignifying restaurant would be complete without condiments. For one, salsa macha—something you rarely see even in Mexican restaurants around Philly. When you do, it's often missing peanuts. Without them, it's just chili oil. Those little details are important to Chef Rene and Alex.



If you're wise, you'll add Korean cucumber pickles. It's a perfect marriage of savory, sweet, and heat folded into fat. It speaks to all three cultures fluently. Korean. Mexican. Philadelphia.

Next, you have the Korean beef birria tacos. A splash of birria hits the flat top, allowing the meat to develop a crispy, charred texture and caramelize in its own fat before being stuffed into corn tortillas with melted cheese, cilantro & onion, and served with a side of consome broth for dipping. (continued on page 25.)



Doing things by the book isn't always on the menu. Case in point, the bulgogi cheesesteak. It's not a gimmick, but a logical extension of the place. Philly already understands beef, indulgence, and contrast. This isn't your standard "Wit" or "Witout."

Paying homage to Alex's Korean roots, this cheesesteak has marinated bulgogi beef, melted Cooper Sharp, gochujang mayo, and scallions on a Liscio's sesame seed hoagie roll.





That whole operation didn't happen overnight. Alex and Rene met while working in the same kitchen. In 2022, Alex and Rene retrofitted an old food cart and started slinging tacos at festivals around Philadelphia.

A year later, they went all in and opened their first brick-and-mortar at 3101 Tasker Street in South Philly. In 2025, they expanded to Fishtown before opening their third location at Franklin Table in University City. Growth, yes, but never at the expense of their quality. We've all seen what forced fusion looks like. Food created in boardrooms, stripped of soul, designed to chase trends instead of hunger. It's your local Crapplebees rolling out something like an "Asian chicken salad." A dish engineered under fluorescent lights, dreamed up by people staring at an overhead projector and a red profit margin line going up. No soul. No culture. Just vague flavors slapped together because someone thought it sounded sophisticated enough to sell.

The word authenticity can be problematic. A term typically wielded by people looking to start an argument rather than a conversation. The only thing that matters is whether someone is being authentic to themselves.

Korea Taqueria feels honest. Confident without being stuffy and playful without being careless. You can tell it took some time to get where they are.

By the end, our visit didn't feel like research. It felt like hanging out. It's always nice when people are genuinely excited you're there, like when you went to a friend's house as a kid, and they couldn't wait to show you their toys.

This isn't about Korean food or Mexican food. It's about honoring what was handed down, sharing it without apology, and trusting that nothing gets lost in translation. 



Introducing our new chicken snack sticks, available in Korean BBQ and Classic Roast. Seven grams of portable protein made for the movers, the shakers, the money makers, and the road trip takers. See you on the highway.



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CUCUMBER KIMCHI

BY ALEX SHERACK

INGREDIENTS

2 MEDIUM CUCUMBERS, THINLY
SLICED
2 TBSP SALT
1 TSP SOY SAUCE
1 TBSP SUGAR
1 TSP CHOPPED GARLIC
1 TSP GINGER

2 TSP TOASTED SESAME SEEDS
PINCH OF VERY THINLY SLICED
ONION
2 TSP GOCHUGARU FLAKES
(KOREAN CHILI FLAKES)
2 TSP GOCHUJANG PASTE
1 TSP SESAME OIL

METHOD

- 1 Lightly salt the cucumber slices and let them sit for 10–15 minutes. Drain any excess water.
- 2 In a bowl, mix together sugar, garlic, sesame seeds, soy sauce, onion, gochugaru, ginger, and gochujang paste, sesame oil.
- 3 Toss the cucumbers with the seasoning mixture until evenly coated.
- 4 Serve immediately for a fresh crunch, or refrigerate for a day or two to let the flavors deepen.
- 5 Want to make a cucumber kimchi slaw? Shred some cabbage and carrots, and mix through some cucumber kimchi and the juices!



SCAN FOR PLAYLIST

Fry Curious

Finding Comfort in the Unknown.

Some foods hold a special place in our hearts, and we order them so regularly that they become part of our subconscious. French fries live in that category.

Rarely is there another food that can compete with the taste of crispy, golden, salty fried potatoes. But what if there was something else? A food that struck all the same flavor profiles and triggered sense memories of those drive-thru delights. Well, I'm here to tell you that it has happened in the form of tiny fried fish at Ken's Seafood.

Our friends have a ritual of going to Ken's late at night. Someone throws up the Ken's signal in the group chat around 11 pm, and that's it. Whoever can make it, makes it. Sometimes it's three people, sometimes it's ten. It usually happens after a long day. Most of the group works restaurant hours, so the last thing anyone wants is to cook their own food.

Ken's exists outside the normal rules of time. It looks the same no matter what day it is. When you walk in, any outside light disappears immediately,

blocked by a wall of fish tanks that cast a somewhat eerie glow. The round, lazy-Susan tables are always clean and dressed with white tablecloths. Somehow, even when the restaurant seem full, you get seated right away.

Late at night, most of the noise isn't from the dining room. You can hear the muffled sound of someone singing Mr. Brightside because Ken's also has a karaoke lounge on the second floor.

Years ago, after the Chinatown Night Market, a friend wanted some after-hours food, so we tried to find a place that wasn't completely slammed. "You can always count on Ken's," he said. It was the perfect comedown from the crowd. As we sat down, he told us we had to order the salt-baked silverfish.

Ok, yeah. Tiny fried fish. Doesn't exactly seem approachable to most folks. I get it. But in my opinion, they live in the same category as McDonald's French fries. It's a risky comparison, but I mean it in the purest sense.



PHOTOS BY K.C. TINARI



These crispy, undersized ocean creatures, sometimes labeled noodlefish, silverfish, or whitebait, are topped with a loose scatter of fried chilies and a soy-based sauce that hardly matters, as the fish do most of the heavy lifting. The crunch is instantaneous. They are familiar in a way that surprises you, like fries, just briner. We order them so often that I've started ordering them anywhere I see them on a menu. Loyalty through repetition, I suppose. Pavlovian, even.

In many places, this is just everyday food. Not a dare or novelty. Just something you eat because it's delicious.

One of my favorite pieces of trivia is how the name even slipped into language. In Hong Kong, the term "noodlefish" became slang for white canvas sneakers. White shoes were considered bad luck, so a seller started calling them noodlefish instead. White. Familiar. Harmless. It worked. That logic makes sense to me.

This is food you eat the way people eat fries. One disappears before you've even pulled out of the parking lot. A handful vanishes on the ride home. You eat them straight from the container. By the first red light, you're already doing the math and realizing you should've ordered more.

Without sounding snide, I think a lot of adults still order like kids. There's an automatic no before there's a yes. Fish sounds scary, but these are not aggressive, they don't demand bravery.

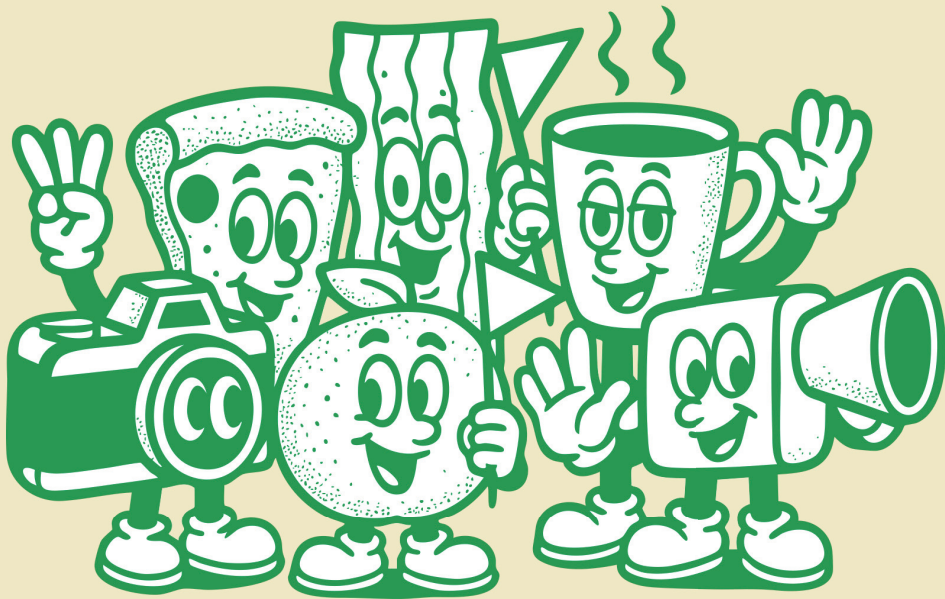
The point is that comfort doesn't belong to any one culture or person. It shows up late at night, after a long day, when you're not trying to be impressed. With a little luck, that feeling will show up again sometime in your life in the form of something unexpected. It's important you say yes when it shows up. After all, Sometimes comfort looks like something you've been trained to say no to your entire life. 





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